



BLM NEWS RELEASE

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Bureau of Land Management
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Federal Agencies Announce Initial Step to Incorporate Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Measures into Land Management Plans

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) today announced the initial steps in a formal planning process to evaluate greater sage-grouse conservation measures in land use plans in 10 western states. The two public land management agencies are opening a 60-day public comment period on issues that should be addressed in Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statements (SEISs) that will be published in the *Federal Register* on Dec. 9.

Based on ongoing threats to the greater sage-grouse and its habitat throughout the West, as well as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2015 deadline for making a decision whether to list the species under the Endangered Species Act, the BLM and the USFS aim to incorporate consistent objectives and conservation measures into relevant Resource Management Plans by September 2014. As a result, the accompanying environmental reviews will be conducted under expedited timeframes.

"As the steward of more than half of all remaining sagebrush habitat in the United States, the BLM is playing a leading role in developing and implementing land management actions to conserve the sage-grouse and its habitat," BLM Director Bob Abbey said. "Today's action is the first step in formally involving the states, tribes, local governments, researchers, organizations, and the interested public in addressing sage-grouse conservation in our multiple land management plans in 10 western states. Working with our partners, we will use these land use plans to implement actions range-wide so we can conserve and restore the greater sage-grouse and its habitat on BLM lands over the short term and the long term."

Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell said, "the agency is committed to conserving the habitat of the greater sage-grouse to prevent the species from being listed under the Endangered Species Act. We welcome the invitation from the Bureau of Land Management to work together as one federal family on this important issue."

Greater sage-grouse currently use as much as 47 million acres of land managed by the BLM, and about nine million acres of land managed by the USFS. As many as 98 BLM Resource Management Plans address greater sage-grouse, while the USFS expects to evaluate conservation measures into as many as nine Land and Resource Management Plans considered high priority for the conservation of sage-grouse. The BLM and the USFS expect to prepare EISs to analyze proposed amendments to some Land Use Plans that are not currently undergoing amendment or revision. For plans already under amendment or revision, the BLM and the USFS will consider incorporating conservation measures, either through the ongoing amendment or revision process, or through SEISs.

In an effort to encourage tailored, region-specific partnerships, cooperation and restoration measures, the planning process will be coordinated under two regions: an Eastern region which includes land use plans in the states of Colorado, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota and portions of Utah and Montana; and a Western Region which includes land use plans in northeastern California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, and portions of Utah and Montana.

Public meetings will be held in communities throughout the west in January and February 2012 to provide an opportunity for interested parties to talk to staff and resource specialists and submit written comments on the proposal in person. In Oregon the meetings are scheduled for Lakeview on Jan. 17, Ontario on Jan. 23, Baker City on Jan. 24, Burns on Jan. 25, and Prineville on Jan. 26. Specific times and locations for these meetings will be announced through local media and on the BLM's Greater Sage-grouse website at <http://www.blm.gov/sagegrouse>.

Comments may be made to the BLM during the scoping meetings or by any of the following methods:

- Eastern Region
 - web site: <http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/sagegrouse/eastern.html>
 - email: sageeast@blm.gov
 - fax: 307-775-6042
 - mail: Eastern Region Project Manager, BLM Wyoming State Office, 5353 Yellowstone, Cheyenne, WY 82009
- Western Region
 - web site: <http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/sagegrouse/western.html>
 - email: sagewest@blm.gov
 - fax: 775-861-6747
 - mail: Western Region Project Manager, BLM Nevada State Office, 1340 Financial Blvd., Reno, NV 89502

To ensure that comments and information are fully considered during the preparation of the EISs/SEISs, the BLM must receive them by close of business on February 7, 2012. All comments and submissions will be considered in the environmental analysis process.

For further information or to have your name added to the mailing list, contact: Chuck Otto, Eastern Region Project Manager, (307) 775-6062; mailing address 5353 Yellowstone Road, Cheyenne, WY 82009; email cotto@blm.gov; or Brian Amme, Western Region Project Manager; (775) 861-861-6645; mailing address 1340 Financial Boulevard, Reno, NV 89520; email bamme@blm.gov.

The BLM and the USFS have identified the following preliminary issues to address in its environmental analysis: Greater Sage-Grouse habitat management, fluid minerals, coal mining, hard rock mining, mineral materials, rights-of-way, renewable energy development, wildfire, invasive species, grazing, off highway vehicle management and recreation.

The BLM and the USFS will use the most current science for the analysis, including: *The Greater Sage-Grouse: Ecology and Conservation of a Landscape Species and its Habitat* (Knick and Connelly, eds. 2010). The BLM and USFS will also use The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' (WAFWA) *Conservation Assessment of Greater Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush Habitats* (2004) and *Greater Sage-Grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy* (2010), as well as the BLM's National Sage-Grouse

Conservation Strategy). Copies of assessment and strategy are available on the BLM's sage-grouse website.

The BLM manages more land - over 245 million acres - than any other Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The Bureau, with a budget of about \$1 billion, also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources on public lands.

The Forest Service manages 155 units (e.g. National Forests, National Grasslands) on 190 million acres. Approximately 30 National Forests include shrub-steppe habitat for Greater Sage-Grouse. Habitats on USFS lands are peripheral to BLM lands, and generally provide summer brood-rearing habitat for the species, though some units also include other seasonal habitats. The FWS identified nine National Forests and Grasslands considered important for the conservation of this species. These are the Thunder Basin and Curlew National Grasslands; and the Uinta, Dixie, Fishlake, Sawtooth, Caribou, Malheur and Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forests. The Malheur NF is currently in plan revision. Consequently, this Forest will incorporate conservation measures through the revision process and is not expected to be included in this larger effort at this time.